

Study finds bereavement program helps children deal with grief

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The research, published in *Death Studies*, assessed the effectiveness of a new two-day childhood bereavement service called Lionheart Camp for Kids, which provides support to grieving children aged five to 12 years

living in Perth who are grieving the death of a parent, primary caregiver or sibling.

The camp is run by a team of expert staff including a [clinical psychologist](#), bereavement counselor, teacher and [social workers](#), and includes collaborative activities for [children](#) and their caregivers such as sharing photographs of their deceased family member and discussing coping strategies such as breathing and relaxation techniques.

Lead author Associate Professor Lauren Breen, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University, said the death of a family member is a significant stressor for young children, so it was important to identify services that help to support both the child and their caregiver during the process.

"The death of a parent or sibling is one of the most distressing experiences that can occur for children during childhood, increasing the risk of post-[traumatic stress disorder](#), depression, prolonged grief disorder and long-term cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes," Associate Professor Breen said.

"The age of the child, the cause of death of the loved one, the relationship to the deceased and the relationship with the remaining caregiver shape the way a child responds to loss and grief. Lionheart Camp for Kids aims to improve long-term life outcomes for grieving children and enable them to integrate grief into their everyday lives.

"Our findings show that the camp may help children's peer relationships, promote positive parenting practices, and potentially improve the grieving process. The feedback from the caregivers was very positive and the children reported feeling better at the end of the camp."

Associate Professor Breen said Lionheart Camp for Kids was

specifically designed to support children adapt to their loss and prevent negative long-term outcomes.

"Further research is needed to determine the full benefits of the camp in helping children deal with the loss of a significant person in their lives. It may be beneficial to look at the long-term benefits of the [camp](#)," Associate Professor Breen said.

More information: Natasha Griffiths et al. A pilot study of a new bereavement program for children: Lionheart Camp for Kids, *Death Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/07481187.2019.1702121](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1702121)

For more information, see lionheartcampforkids.com.au/

Provided by Curtin University

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